

February 13, 2023

Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Human Services Committee in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status.

Co-Chairs Senator Lesser and Representative Gilchrist, Ranking Members Senator Seminara and Representative Case, and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Sandra Wood Forand and I live in Hartford. I am a member of Asylum Hill Congregational Church, and my congregation is a member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), a broad-based organization of 49 faith institutions working together to advance social justice in our region and state.

I am writing in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status.

Personally, this issue matters to me because I have over 30 years of experience with a close family member who has had significant mental health challenges for much of his life. For over half of that time he was uninsured. His life has been a constant struggle, but he has had two key advantages: family support from a family with education and financial resources, and he is a white U.S. citizen.

The Problem:

- As my family has experienced, without insurance, it is nearly impossible to access mental health care. It's hard enough to find care when you have coverage, but the uninsured are left with even fewer resources. Paying out of pocket is unaffordable even for middle-income people, let alone for folks with lower incomes.
- Like my family member, many members of the immigrant community, *including 58% of undocumented folks in our state*, are without any form of health insurance to cover mental or physical health care (compared to just 5% of the overall population). In addition, being a member of a marginalized community increases the risk of mental health challenges due to the impacts of prejudice and systemic oppression. Meanwhile, *undocumented people pay \$187 million annually in Connecticut taxes*.

The Solution:

- At long last my family member has qualified for HUSKY insurance, and has consistent access to medication and health care. Unlike some private coverage, HUSKY insurance offers true mental health parity, covering mental health on par with physical health. Expanding access to HUSKY by passing HB 6616 will provide critical access to care, including for adolescents and young adults, during the years when major mental health disorders often emerge.

- Expanding HUSKY to undocumented people is not a controversial issue and is supported by a majority of CT voters. 57% of voters support expanding HUSKY to all undocumented immigrants, including 84% of Democrats, 83% of Black voters, and 76% of Latinx voters.

Expanding HUSKY access to all income-eligible people, regardless of immigration status, will meaningfully expand access to mental (as well as physical) health care to people who are currently excluded yet provide important services to our state. It is economically sensible, and the best way to increase the number of productive residents of Connecticut. More than that, it is the moral, just, and faithful thing to do. HB 6616 is an important step in this direction. Please advance this bill out of committee in its current form, and then champion it in the full legislature. I look forward to supporting your efforts.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Sandra Wood Forand
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